

# PROVENCE

Letter from the Editor

Saturday, February 3, 2024

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Today, we're revisiting an interview with Ebecho Muslimova originally published in the SS21 *'Scandal'* issue of PROVENCE. The conversation, titled *'Do you fuck in your studio?'* in its print version, still feels like a topical and entertaining read to us. So, here you go (again):

XX,  
PROVENCE



Interviews

Mitchell Anderson



Ebecho Muslimova, *FATEBE SPECIERE MURAL*, 2022. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Maria Bernheim.

Mitchell Anderson: I've always wanted to ask you what your mom thinks about your work.

Ebecho Muslimova: Oh, she's supportive, she likes to correct Fatebe's poses like, "you wouldn't quite see her pussy in this position." She has this theory that Fatebe is a depiction of her. Which I can't even handle discussing with her, for psychological reasons.

MA: Do you feel shame even when Fatebe doesn't?

EM: Definitely when I begin developing a piece. I need to get her dumb enough in just the right way before a piece works for me. The line between stupid-dumb and pretentious-dumb is so fine that sorting through it almost always feels shitty and embarrassing.

MA: I know you've been confronted regarding the visual disparity between Fatebe and yourself, it confuses people that you are thin and beautiful.

EM: First of all, I see her body as part of mine, just an exaggerated version. Besides the extra flesh, she's also extra flexible and limber, but unlike me, she's superhumanly strong and often manages to defy gravity. I've always had body image shit. Early on when I started drawing her, it was a way of relieving anxiety over the things that seemed trivial, and so I never properly addressed them. This bodily preoccupation seemed to belong to a category of irrelevant concerns that should be somehow— even if only indirectly— resolved or surpassed so I could think about greater art things. This was in school, it was baggage. I needed to draw a liberated make-believe character who is simultaneously unaffected by bodies, nudity, alienation, sexual shame, and so on, and literally rolling around in the shit of it.

MA: We're Facetimeing each other from our studios right now, and I'm thinking about one line in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by Milan Kundera. Have you read it?

EM: Yes, but, like, in high school, I don't remember much of it. I remember Tomas being annoying.

MA: Same here, but I loved this one part: this letter he gets from his mistress saying, "I want to make love to you in my studio." As a repressed art student, I thought that was the life! Do you fuck in your studio?

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**"The worst thing is that I live in my studio and I don't think I've ever gotten laid here."**

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EM: No, I don't even like hanging out in my studio, I don't want people to come over. I come here to work and then I get out, you know? I've been naked in another person's studio for photos, just as a naked lady decoration. But that wasn't sex, that was the patina of a man's studio.

MA: The worst thing is that I live in my studio and I don't think I've ever gotten laid here. So, the studio isn't a sexy place. Is Fatebe sexy? Sexual?

EM: She's just bodily, I guess sex for her is just like any other bodily function: like digestion. It's just a feature of hers. She's not too preoccupied with it.

MA: Does she even have sex?

EM: She's given head a couple times.

MA: How generous.

EM: Yeah, she's done her part. Like, early on in the first series, she gives her first blow job. She doesn't know how to operate a penis, so she kind of looks straight at it with her big eyes, like a chicken would. And then there was her first threeway, but that was just two dicks in her mouth. Stuffed full like a chipmunk.

MA: I was just listening to a podcast about Fragonard, they kept on saying how rococo was a bastard movement. I have to admit, I'm living for rococo. What they said, which was interesting, was that even though it's men doing the painting, it's the women pictured who have sexual autonomy. For maybe the first time in Western art history, you have women revealing themselves on the swing. They're not just being merely acted upon.

EM: Women interested in and enjoying sex.

MA: It's interesting to me because Fragonard was then eliminated from the art history canon for around a century. I wonder if part of it is how uncomfortable people become in front of images of women in charge of their own pleasure and sexuality.

EM: Fatebe's sexuality comes up a lot because seeing a woman be sensual and naked but not necessarily having sex is confusing for people. Being a sexual beast may just not be a priority for the naked woman. Fatebe is naked a lot of the time, and maybe she needs to like rub one out from time to time. It's not a big deal. Just like how it is in real life. We either have sex or pleasure ourselves, then we move on with our day.

MA: So, you're saying you masturbate in the studio.

EM: Oh definitely. But that's just to get it out of the way. Like, before I have to write a difficult e-mail.

MA: Jacking off is the grand studio procrastination.

EM: It's the last resort, like "bitch, you've done everything already can you get to work now?" What else can you do?

MA: One of the criticisms of your work is that it's vulgar in content and form.

EM: Ah yes, that it's illustration.

MA: I think that's the radical part. Some people find it aggressive. Viewers get confused. For some people, the vulgarity of your illustrations is like publically fucking oneself with a random object. I find your style interesting, the paintings work in a variety of lowly ways, they're not strictly "painterly" in the highbrow sense.

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**"It's about finding the perfect level of the right dumb."**

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EM: It's about finding the perfect level of the right dumb, whether it's in technique or narrative.

MA: When you show the work to a lover, do they give you feedback? Do they try to get involved with Fatebe, as if she's another woman?

EM: Strangely enough, everyone kind of walks around the main thing, which is her. They'll discuss some aspects of the work, but never really touch upon her drive. Like, in one recent painting they'll comment on the fruit, but not her asshole and pussy.

MA: Do you think there's a fear that one day you will become Fatebe? Like, if it is mentioned, that it will eventually be realized?

EM: Oh yeah, there's a fear that this is somewhere within me. Maybe the fear isn't that I'll become her physically, but that this female mushy lineage which has no beginning nor an end could possibly spill over the edges into their lives. Which is true: it's possible.

MA: I read an article about Disney villains once. It spoke about how Ursula from *The Little Mermaid* (1989) is the most terrifying character to a normative audience not just because she's a fat woman, but because she's an unapologetically fat woman.

EM: The murky octopus dark world, what else is lurking behind the shadows? That's why Fatebe has this black-and-white line. There's no shadows, she just is. All the uncomfortable things the viewers say they see are imagined. They're bringing that with them to the work. Fatebe has always been overexposed, you see everything.

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**"I feel like I haven't fucked through the art world enough to give a truly interesting answer."**

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MA: We wanted to talk about us as artists fucking other artists.

EM: I feel like I haven't fucked through the art world enough to give a truly interesting answer.

MA: I think I've only fucked—he'd claim we dated—one other artist of note, and I feel like it's uninteresting enough for the rest of the time. Now curators on the other hand, I was very nearly in love some years back.

EM: I had a summer fling with a European artist in New York, he took a photograph of me in his studio. He was obsessed with feet and I would walk on his canvases to dirty them. He made a catalogue of paintings, women's feet, and the picture he took of me. The thing is, it's a great picture. I'll show it to my grandchildren. I look like the girl from *Ringu* (1998) in the middle of a guy's messy studio.

MA: The only artist who ever asked me to get naked was Ryan McGinley. But I said no because I could just see this photo of five hot models and then me, looking like the stick a hot marshmallow had just been pulled from.

EM: Yeah, you and everybody else. You should have asked him to turn back time and take you to your twenties.

MA: I was twenty-one when this happened, Jesus. But my hairy chest wouldn't have matched the aesthetic. I was thinking of shaving it all so I don't get hair on the surface of my new paintings.

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